

# **Opening Remarks at the IDRC/CIDA Panel Session**

## **At the International Economic Forum of the Americas (Conférence de Montréal)**

**Monday, May 30, 2005**

**Maureen O'Neil  
President, International Development Research Centre**

Bonjour, Mesdames et Messieurs. Good morning, Ladies and Gentlemen. The International Development Research Centre is pleased to be taking part once again in the International Economic Forum of the Americas. This is our fifth Forum, and the third at which we have hosted a session in partnership with the Canadian International Development Agency.

Africa and international development issues are finally gaining more prominence on the agendas of international forums and economic summits such as the G8. The media – journalists, in particular – are also starting to pay more attention to Africa. We more often read in our newspapers about the challenges that the continent is facing — and, refreshingly, about African success stories. Our panel today will touch on both these aspects.

The topic of our panel, “Connectivity for Entrepreneurship — Learning from Innovative Partnerships in Africa”, is quite relevant to the current political and development context. Canada recently released its International Policy Statement, in which the private sector has been identified as a priority sector for development.

Consistent with the recommendations of the UN Commission on the Private Sector and Development, Canada will support developing countries' own efforts to strengthen their private sector as the engine of economic growth through creating an enabling environment, including through "smarter" regulation; promoting entrepreneurship; and supporting connection to markets.

Enabling an environment for private sector development is also a priority for IDRC. IDRC recently approved an Investment Climate and Business Environment Research Facility for Africa for inception in the current fiscal year. Its mandate will be to facilitate grassroots and indigenous research on the actual enabling environment and policies for small and medium enterprises.

Another priority for the Centre is — and has long been — to promote the use of information and communications technologies for development. A tradition of innovation that began with an emphasis on building databases and information systems has evolved into a focus on the

transformative nature of information and communications technologies, or ICTs. IDRC was one of the first development agencies to embrace ICTs as a key means to foster development and alleviate poverty. With established programs like Acacia in Africa, Pan Asia Networking in Asia, and Pan Americas in Latin America, IDRC has acquired a breadth of experience on the impact of ICTs on the lives of people in the developing world. As a result, the Government of Canada has asked IDRC to serve as host of the Canadian pavilion at the next World Summit on the Information Society.

Building on its experience, IDRC, in collaboration with Industry Canada and CIDA, has established two major Canadian-led initiatives to bridge the digital divide:

the Institute for Connectivity in the Americas, emerging from the Summit of the Americas in 2001; Connectivity Africa, resulting from the 2002 G8 Summit.

IDRC also houses the Bellanet secretariat, which promotes and facilitates institutional and individual collaboration within the international development community, especially through the use of ICTs.

I should also mention an initiative that IDRC will be launching officially at the World Summit on the Information Society in Tunis in November 2005: TELECENTRE.ORG [*pronounced telecentre dot org*], a collaboration involving IDRC, Microsoft, and other social investors. This project will help community telecentres around the world increase their capacity to promote digital inclusion. Both IDRC and Microsoft recognize the key role that community telecentres play in addressing the digital divide by giving underserved communities access to technology and skills training. Telecentre.org will invest in activities that benefit grassroots telecentres as well as deliver services that connect and nurture the telecentre movement globally. On the ground, activities will be driven by local and regional telecentre leaders.

Reactions to this collaboration with Microsoft have been very interesting. IDRC and Microsoft have jointly contributed initial financing of 13 million Canadian dollars to underwrite both operations and investments in network-led initiatives. IDRC is currently in discussion with additional investors and an initial set of network partners. In fact, IDRC has concluded negotiations with a major European international development organization to invest an additional \$5 million (Canadian) in the telecentre.org initiative. This brings the total contributions to date to \$18 million. It is important to note that this initiative is about people and communities, not software, although technology neutrality, transparency, and a social mission are among its principal values. It will help the people who make telecentres flourish — trainers, managers, volunteers, information brokers — to solve problems, share resources, and support each other.

All these programs have shown great results. For example: through Connectivity Africa, a project using technology more effectively to collect and share health information has helped many countries allocate resources more efficiently and, ultimately, provide more people access to better health care, especially in rural and remote areas. A partnership between Connectivity Africa, Satelife Inc., Uganda Chartered HealthNet, and the Faculty of Medicine of Makerere University has helped the Uganda Health Information Network cut costs and improve the quality and availability of health information by using low-cost PDAs and a cellular telephony network.

Another partnership involving Connectivity Africa, the University of Cape Town Lung Institute, the Medical Research Council of South Africa, the University of Toronto, the Institute for Clinical Evaluative Sciences, and the Free State Department of Health is developing an extensive and

multipurpose database to collect and manage large volumes of time-sensitive data in the wide-scale roll-out of anti-retroviral therapy (ART) for HIV-positive patients in South Africa. Less than 1% of South Africans who qualify for ART have access to the treatment, but a data warehouse of patient profiles, epidemiological monitoring, and information on drug responses and availability could revolutionize treatment and lead to more effective policies in South Africa and across the continent.

These are some examples from IDRC's experience. I know that you will hear similar success stories from our panelists, who will bring their own perspectives, views, and experiences on key issues.

**\*\*END OF OPENING REMARKS\*\***

I now invite Mr. Paul Hunt, Vice-President of the Africa Branch at the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), to say a few words.

Mr. Hunt makes a three-minute presentation.

Thank you Mr. Hunt.

Before I introduce our first speaker, I would remind you that French and English interpretation is provided and that the receivers are available in the hall. The speakers will each make a 15-minute presentation and then we will open the floor to questions.

Our first speaker is the Honourable Minister Venâncio Massingue who is well known to IDRC. Minister Massingue recently became Mozambique's Minister of Science and Technology. IDRC also knows him as the information and communication technologies champion. Previously, he was Vice-Rector of the University Eduardo Mondlane (UEM), where he bridged the worlds of academia and politics. He has used his knowledge of both these worlds to help bring Mozambique into the "information age."

Since 2001, he has created and continues to support the Mozambique Information and Communication Technology Institute. He obtained his Ph.D. from the Technology University of Delft in The Netherlands in 2003. He exemplifies what IDRC is trying to do. For example, when asked, during an interview with one of our writers: "Can technology accelerate a country's development?", he replied: "Yes! but you have to define development." I believe that whatever we do should be people-centred and should aim to improve the quality of life of each person, in terms of health, education, and socioeconomic position. The question is then, "what role can technology play to contribute to these definitions."

Minister Massingue...

*Presentation by Minister Massingue (15 minutes)*

Thank you, Dr. Massingue.

It is now my pleasure to introduce Mr. Charles Sirois, CEO of Telesystem Ltd. and Chairman of Enablis Global, Canada.

Figure de premier plan dans le secteur des communications canadiennes, Charles Sirois est fondateur et principal actionnaire de Télésystème Ltée, et il est également président du conseil, président et chef de la direction de cette société de capitaux privés.

De 1992 à 2000, Monsieur Sirois a également été président du conseil et chef de la direction de Téléglobe Inc., un chef de file mondial des services interurbains et à large bande qui exploite le réseau d'accès Internet le plus étendu au monde.

Monsieur Sirois fut membre fondateur de Télésystem International Wireless Corporation N.V., créée en septembre 1994. Il a occupé la présidence du conseil de cette société jusqu'en mars 1997, lorsque l'entreprise est devenue Télésystème Mobiles International Inc. (TIW) dans le cadre d'un premier appel public à l'épargne. Monsieur Sirois a agi en tant que président du conseil de TIW de mars 1997 à juillet 2004.

Il siège au conseil de la Banque Canadienne Impériale de Commerce et il est président du conseil et chef de la direction de Réseau Entrepreneurial Enablis, un organisme à but non lucratif parrainé par le Groupe de travail du G8. Monsieur Sirois était auparavant membre du Groupe de travail du G8 et du Groupe de travail national sur les services à large bande. Il a de plus été membre fondateur de la Global Information Infrastructure Commission (Washington).

Charles Sirois est titulaire d'un baccalauréat en finances de l'Université de Sherbrooke (Québec), d'une maîtrise en finances de l'Université Laval (Québec) et de doctorats honorifiques de l'Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM), de l'Université d'Ottawa, de l'Université Concordia et de l'Université Laval. Il est décoré de l'Ordre du Canada (1994) et a été nommé chevalier de l'Ordre national du Québec (1998).

Monsieur Sirois...

*Charles Sirois (15 minutes)*

Merci Monsieur Sirois.

I am now pleased to introduce Dr. George Manu, CEO of Creative Squares Ltd., an international consultancy and venture management company based in the UK. He has carried out consultancy assignments in SME and private sector development in over 40 countries on four continents. Previously, he was CEO of EMPRETEC Ghana Foundation – a best practice model for enterprise development that successfully combines broadcast data systems and financial services targeted at growth-oriented SMEs. Prior to that, he worked with the International Labour Organization (ILO) of the United Nations for six years as head of the SME Development Unit, based in Turin, Italy. Previous appointments include faculty positions at the University of Durham Business School and Stirling University as well as spells in industry in the UK. He has served on several boards including Ghana's privatization agency, a family-owned food business, the Ministerial Advisory Council to the Minister for Private Sector Development in Ghana, and two private equity funds. He is currently a member of the international consulting team assisting in the design and marketing of the Investment Climate Facility for Africa (ICF) – a 550 million American-dollar initiative aimed at

making Africa an even better place to do business. He holds a Ph.D. in Business Administration (specializing in SME development in developing countries) from the University of Durham, UK.

Dr Manu ...

*George Manu (15 minutes)*

Thank you, Dr. Manu.

Our last speaker this morning is Margaret Reid, Vice President of Product Platform Development and Management with Visa International, in the U.S. Margaret Reid leads a team that is responsible for global consumer product development, focusing on both existing platforms and new solutions that will enhance or extend Visa's payment platforms. Specifically, Ms. Reid's team has played an integral part in the development of payment solutions using contactless technologies at the physical point-of-sale and a new service that allows payments to be sent to a Visa account enabling Visa members to offer innovative money transfer services. In addition, her team has been responsible for introducing programs that have enabled Visa products to be made available to new groups of customers, such as the un-banked or youth segments.

Ms. Reid joined Visa in 1988 in what was then the Europe, Middle East and Africa Region based in London. For the next five years, she worked on the development of T&E programs and debit product management including responsibility for the Plus and Electron programs. She moved to Visa headquarters in 1993 and worked on development of the global Visa/Plus ATM network and chip cards, including stored value and multi-application programs, before taking on her current responsibilities.

Ms. Reid has a BA in Business Administration from Loughborough University of Technology in the UK.

Ms. Reid...

*Margaret Reid (15 minutes)*

Thank you, Ms. Reid.

At this point, we would be happy to entertain questions. Microphones have been set up for this purpose. Please identify yourselves when you pose your question or make your comment.